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ABSTRACT

Problems in supervision stem from the reality that operationalizing supervision is not a cognitive state of mind, but one in the affective domain, contrary to most techniques. Administrators often discover that the interpersonal skills needed in facilitating change and dealing with resistance are not available. This paper outlines a process that energizes and empowers employees; it consists of four steps: (1) focusing--setting short- and long-term goals, an activity which incorporates role definition and clarification, behavioral objectives, and evaluation criteria; (2) coaching--providing expertise on how to improve and enhance a teaching technique through various processes; (3) counseling--providing opportunities for administrator and teacher to reflect on a particular lesson, to examine reasons for success, or to explore options to improve performance; and (4) evaluating--occurring at the end of the year whereby the problem-solving process is culminated. To operationalize this process, the use of the sensing interview is suggested to (1) diagnose the problem by listening to the employee, (2) acknowledge understanding, (3) explore options, and (4) respond. In this way, both evaluator and evaluatee are on the same side, without blame, and the employee is empowered to develop new skills, explore and change behaviors, and accept responsibility. Included are 28 references and 3 diagrams. (WTH)

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PROBLEM SOLVING:
A WAY TO OPERATIONALIZE
THE SUPERVISION PROCESS

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Have you or your colleagues ever encountered any of the follcwing problems?

o You meet with a teacher to discuss classroom management. He/she agrees with your perceptions and agrees to implement changes. However, at a subsequent observation, you observe the same behavior. Moreover, when you meet again to discuss the problem, the teacher doesn't seem to remember the previous conference.

o Your school secretary is extremely efficient. However, her/his demeanor tends to make teachers feel that they don't have access to you--and you believe in an open door policy. You have mentioned it several times, but she/he continues the behavior.

o A newly assigned teacher responds affirmatively to every suggestion you make. Yet you are certain that she/he does not understand what you expect. However not only are there no questions, but there appears to be a feeling of relief when the conference is over. Subsequent observations indicate that the unwanted behavior is continuing.

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Sounds like perfect situations to use techniques appropriate to most supervision models. The administrator had identified the problem, the employee had agreed to a remedy, and they both expected things to get better. What makes it even more difficult and confounding is that typically the administrator has been inserviced on supervision techniques. Theoretically these problems, when they emerged, should have been solved. As a result, when they tend to recur, there is a distinct feeling that there is something wrong with the supervision process or there is something wrong with them. The authors see it differently.

The problem lies, not in the concepts of supervision, nor in the inadequacy of the individual, but in the reality that operationalizing supervision is not a cognitive state of mind. Application of the concepts is far more difficult than often anticipated. Reading and hearing about it in class, even having it supplemented with role plays, is a far cry from the day-to-day intensity which administrators experience.

Typically the emphasis in training is on quantifying and qualifying observation techniques so that administrators can help teachers and other employees understand and implement behavioral objectives. However when it comes to the delivery system whereby this feedback is provided (e.g., conferencing), administrators run into the problem that people don't fit into neat categories. While there may have been a heavy emphasis on the cognitive domain, often what was missing was in the affective domain, the interpersonal skills of facilitating change and dealing with resistance--the way to operationalize the supervision process.

Therefore the purpose of this article is to aid administrators in overcoming the supervision problems they encounter by illustrating a step-by-step process which energizes and empowers employees. Back to the opening problems.

ANALYSIS OF OPENING PROBLEMS

In a review of the problems, it is evident that one element that each had in common was that the employees had received feedback as part of the evaluation of their performance. The second element was that the feedback was not successful in changing the unwanted behavior. However this experience seems to contradict research findings which indicate that providing feedback to staff is one of the most powerful tools (if not the most powerful tool) that administrators and managers have in the evaluation process. Therefore, as illustrated in the opening scenarios, it is necessary to examine the process to determine why the feedback was not successful.

The analysis indicates that the feedback did not generate the response that the administrator wanted for several reasons. The employees were told what the problems were; they were not part of the diagnosis. The employees were told how to remedy it; they were not part of the problem solving process. In fact, they were viewed as being the problem. This, in turn, often generates resistance which results in no changes in behavior being made.

How can this be changed? It is essential to recognize that feedback is a two-way process. The step most often left out is that after the administrator provides feedback to the employee,

the employee must complete the loop by providing feedback to the administrator. It is through this final step that the administrator ensures that not only does the employee understand and agree to the problem, but is also involved in designing and implementing the behaviors that will effect the needed change. Thus problem solving becomes the essential element of the evaluation process.

EVALUATION AS A PROBLEM SOLVING PROCESS

The authors view evaluation as a problem solving process which consists of a four step continuum defined below: focusing, coaching, counseling and evaluating. It is not the evaluation process whereby administrators administer a standard form as an annual culminating activity.

FOCUSING, COACHING, COUNSELING, AND EVALUATING

- FOCUSING is setting short- and long-term goals, an activity which incorporates role definition and clarification, behavioral objectives, and evaluation criteria.
- COACHING is providing expertise on how to improve and enhance a teaching technique through various processes such as conducting conferences, arranging classroom demonstrations and visitations, and providing inservice classes.
- COUNSELING is an opportunity for administrator and teacher to reflect on a particular lesson or lessons, to examine reasons for its success, or to explore options to improve and enhance performance. It is an opportunity for

both to work together as problem solvers towards the goals of increasing teacher productivity and improving student achievement.

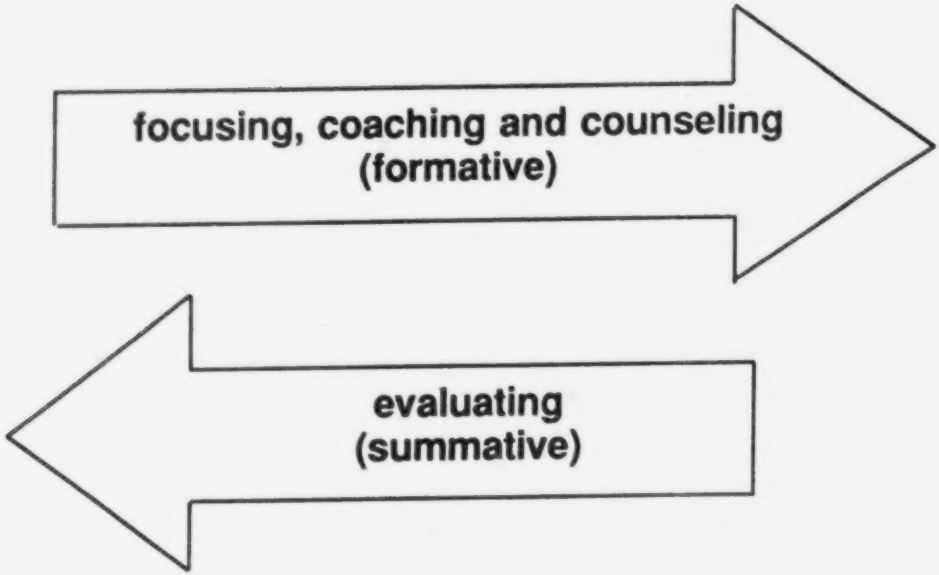
NOTE: Although the definitions focus on the role of teacher, the concepts are applicable to all members of the staff.

o FOCUSING, COACHING, AND COUNSELING may be viewed as formative, in nature, because it helps the employee examine and explore performance while developing new skills to enhance and improve work behaviors. (See Diagram 1)

o EVALUATING is an activity that occurs at the end of the school year whereby the problem solving process is culminated. It is summative in nature. (See Diagram 1) At that time, administrator and employee reflect on the activities of the year to determine which goals have been achieved and which should be carried over to the coming year. It may also be appropriate to set new goals. This definition is not to be confused with the legal evaluation which occurs at a designated time, based on procedures designated by the district and/or state (i.e., Stull).

For those administrators who believe that solutions to problems must come from the supervisor, focusing, coaching, counseling and evaluating may provide the least amount of satisfaction. Further, if the employee, in this subordinate role, has become dependent on the administrator providing all the answers, he/she may experience discomfort at having to take

DIAGRAM 1


focusing, coaching and counseling
(formative)
evaluating
(summative)

responsibility for his/her behavior. However, the focusing, coaching, counseling and evaluating process is one that has the most potential to institute productive change since the role of supervisor/subordinate becomes one of problem solvers working equally to improve performance.

The processes of focusing, coaching, counseling and evaluating provides a support service to the teachers and staff that enables the administrator to make several positive statements:

1. I am willing to invest my time in you.
2. I think you are capable of change
3. I believe you have the ability to improve and enhance your performance.

OPERATIONALIZING THE PROCESS

Operationalizing the supervision process relies on developing skills in conducting a sensing interview, thereby involving the employee in problem solving, as well as facilitating and dealing with resistance to change.

THE SENSING INTERVIEW

The sensing interview (Jones 1973) permits the administrator to determine the position and perceptions of the employee and provides a powerful tool for discovery. This is contrasted with the interrogative interview where the administrator has made a judgment about the behavior and is looking for data to support his/her position.

Diagnosis is the first step of problem solving. This ensures that the problem will be identified and avoids the

pitfall of responding to the symptoms and not the problem. It is in the diagnosis stage where FOCUSING, as described on page 4, occurs. It is through this process that the administrator finds out if the individual is knowledgeable in the goals and objectives of the school. This is fundamental since researchers have found that "when the goals of the school are clear, and perceived as important, and when the staff is committed to them, successful schools result." (NAASP 1982), Yet, as pointed out in the Rand (1986) study, "for improvement of objectives, evaluation processes must yield rich, descriptive information that illuminates sources of difficulty as well as viable courses for change." The sensing interview is the vehicle for illumination.

There are several principles in the sensing interview:

1. establish rapport;
2. don't talk too much;
3. don't argue;
4. don't try to solve the problem (that may come later, and only if you have determined that the employee either does not have the expertise or chooses not to use it);
5. don't let the employee interview you;
6. avoid leading questions and jumping to conclusions;
7. listen and clarify.

Further, there are specific sensing techniques:

1. <u>Listening responses</u> Listening responses are basically neutral, nonjudgmental expressions or gestures which show interest or understanding.

2. Echoes By repeating the key words the employees says, it encourages him/her to clarify and expand what he/she is saying.

3. Paraphrasing The goal of paraphrasing is repeating the concepts in the interviewer's own words for clarification and to increase the accuracy of the information the interviewer is collecting.

4. Perception check The purpose of the perception check is to clarify feelings and to elicit additional information. It will also help the interviewer to validate his/her perceptions of the feeling of the interviewee.

5. Open-ended questions Open ended questions avoid dead-end answers such as "yes" or "no" which don't elicit data. They are difficult to build on and may give the employee the impression that the interviewer is not really interested. Open-ended questions begin on general areas and proceed to more specific areas as the interview progresses. However they are neutral, not attacking, and the goal is to make the interviewee think, not defend. Gibb (1978) defines defensiveness as behavior that occurs when people perceive or anticipate threat. A defensive response is a clear signal that the employee feels attacked or threatened -- behaviors that serve as barrier to accepting change.

6. Silence Silence usually conveys the message that you are waiting and want more information. It should not be used when the interviewee is angry or hostile. In that context, silence suggests that the answer wasn't good enough, a judgment

that is sure to generate anger and hostility.

A final element in using the sensing interview is the use of enabling behaviors as described by Costa (1976). Nodding, gestures, noises of agreement, eye contact, touching (when appropriate) all serve to encourage the person being interviewed to be open and they help to validate that trust is present.

Olsen (1981) made suggestions on improving the interview process. They are: ask open-ended questions; listen; build on information (verbal and non-verbal); and focus on responsibilities and goals, rather than character traits.

Interviewing, therefore, becomes the vehicle to understand what prompted the behavior that you observed -- and with which you experience concerns. Often administrators observe what is perceived as poor performance and respond by making suggestions and correcting the employee. However, as pointed out by Livingston (1979), "subordinates, more often than not, appear to do what they believe they are expected to do." Therefore, in order to proceed, the administrator must accept the caveat that the behavior with which he/she disagreed with most probably seemed a sensible approach to the employee. That is why the sensing interview becomes such an integral part of problem solving. It is through this process that the administrator gains insight into why the employee felt justified in behaving the way he/she did. Thus the sensing interview becomes the tool that the administrator, as change agent, uses in the problem solving

technique.

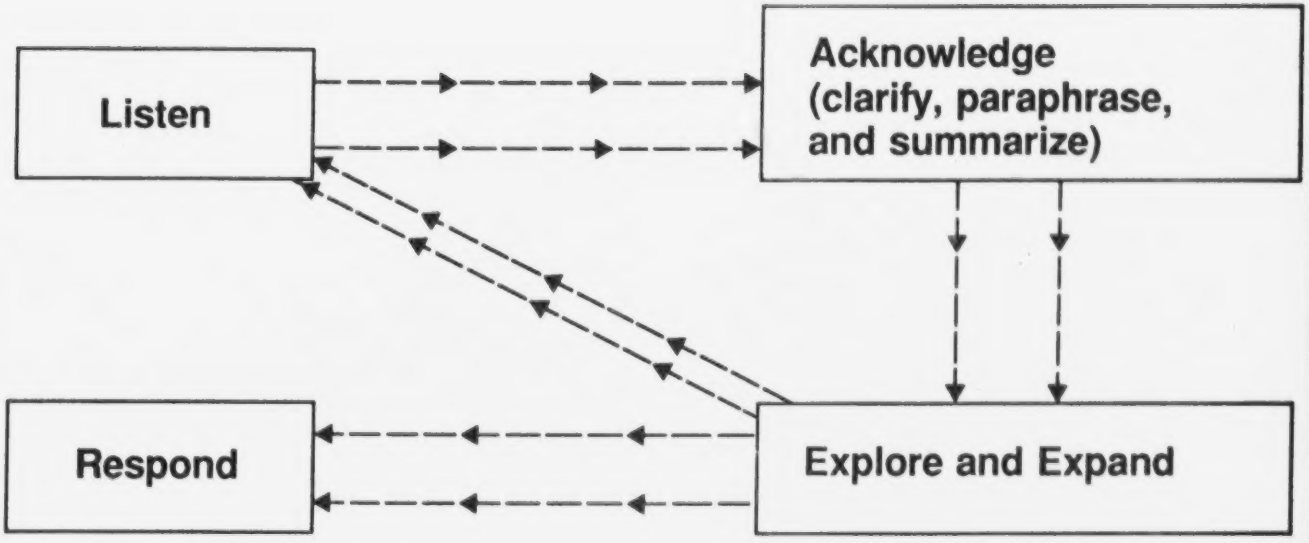
INVOLVING THE EMPLOYEE IN PROBLEM SOLVING TO FACILITATE AND DEAL WITH RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

As defined by Lewin (1951), change is effected by the person becoming aware of the need for a change (unfreezing), learning a new behavior, and making it a part of his/her repertoire (refreezing). In the technique being described (diagram #2), the administrator is seen as a Process Helper (Chartier 1985). In this role, it is his/her job to aid the employees to "recognize and define needs; analyze problems and set goals; obtain needed resources, generate a range of solutions; and evaluate the solutions to determine whether they are meeting organizational needs." Chartier goes on to say that "Process helpers utilize problem-solving skills in order to facilitate change."

Lewin (1951) goes on to define problem solving as consisting of assessing the situation, identifying the problem, defining the goal, analyzing the forces, generating strategies, selecting strategies, forecasting potential problems, testing the strategies, implementing and evaluating the plan, and, continuing the cycle, meeting again to assess the situation. The administrator, as change agent, can facilitate the process by utilizing the model in Diagram 2 (Jones 1986).

In practice, the process is operationalized in the following way: the administrator,through the use of the sensing interview, LISTENS to the employee's perception of why he/she performed the way he/she did. Through the use of open-ended questions and

DIAGRAM 2


Listen
Acknowledge
(clarify, paraphrase,
and summarize)
Respond
Explore and Expand

effective communication, the administrator ACKNOWLEDGES that he/she understands what prompted the behavior (Note: This does not mean that the administrator agrees with the behavior; it just means that he/she understands the behavior from the employee's perceptive). Then, through additional questioning, the administrator can help the employee EXPLORE and EXPAND the options that could have been used to solve the problem. It is only when the administrator has continued this cycle several times will he/she know if the employee has the skills to improve the behavior without help or needs the administrator to RESPOND by making suggestions, offering recommendations, or modeling how a change should be implemented. As described on page 4, the administrator, through COACHING and COUNSELING, works with the employee to empower him/her to develop skills to improve and enhance the performance.

As Maier (1976) points out when distinguishing between the tell and sell method, tell and listen, and problem solving methods, the latter empowers the employees to assess how he/she can improve performance and the administrator is seen as a helper rather than as a judgmental evaluator. In tell and sell and tell and listen, it places the burden on the administrator to identify the problem and suggest methods to improve it. If successful, the administrator gets credit, if not, he/she gets the blame. Because it is not a participative process, the employee has no ownership in the solution and can absolve himself/herself from the being responsible for the failure. Further, in extreme

cases, it can encourage the employee to sabotage the process. Moreover, by denying the employee the opportunity to become his/her own problem solver, it inhibits professional growth and makes him/her rely on the administrator for help. This could be a case where help is not helpful (Egan 1975).

It is apparent that the open-ended questions and the use of derived data serve as the catalyst of change. Listed below are several open-ended questions (Hunter) which aid in facilitating the problem solving process. Although the questions focus on classroom performance, they can be edited for any situation.

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

What do you see as some strengths of the lesson

Share with me what led up to the lesson

How did you feel about the student responses in the lesson

What are your perceptions concerning the effectiveness of this lesson

What things went as planned

What would you do differently

Were you pleased with the way the lesson went today

What unexpected outcomes did you receive

How do you feel your students were responding

What were the unexpected gains

What specific student behaviors were you pleased with in this lesson

What things didn't go as you had planned

How do you feel about the lesson

What options did you have

Which options did you exercise

Which options did you chose not to use

What prompted the choice

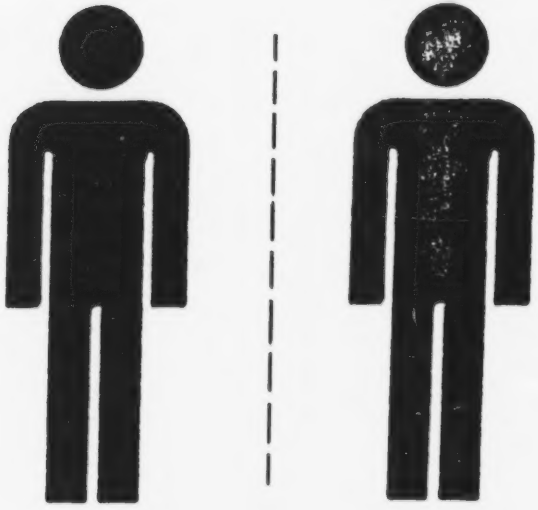
Help me with this, I don't understand

UNDERSTANDING THE EMPLOYEE'S FRAME OF REFERENCE

Culbert and McDonough (1985) point out that "people trust those who have the ability to view them in the proper 'context'" (the word that characterizes the frame of reference that underlies any particular interpretation. A frame of reference is different for every individual. As Diagram 3 illustrates, each person views the word through a personalized frame of reference. "A trust relationship is based on the belief that a second person will make an earnest attempt to view one's behavior within the context of what one had in mind when acting in a certain way." (Culbert 1985,26) "Context depends upon telling people how one's daily activities link both to the role one's group performs and the function they are expected to fill (Culbert 1985, 52).

It is through the problem solving technique, supported with the mastery of interviewing skills, that administrators can elicit the information needed to provide clarity on the employee's perception of his/her context and facilitate a change in behavior. This process enables the administrator to understand the employee's frame of reference and provides the insight to facilitate the exploration of what prompted the behavior. This, in turn, provides a vehicle to explore the

DIAGRAM 3



Frame of Reference

range of options, and to determine if there is the knowledge and the expertise to carry them out. Only then is the administrator in the position to respond -- whether the response is a validation of what was observed, a recognition that the employee is able to "fix" the situation without intervening, or the knowledge that the level of expertise is limited and instruction is needed. As pointed out by Fisher, 1981, 55, "Be hard on the problem, be soft on the people."

FOCUSING, COACHING AND COUNSELING are a continual process throughout the year which leads to EVALUATING. It is at this culminating activity where the administrator and employee reflect on achievements for the year, areas that still need to be developed, and plans for the future. However, whatever term is used to describe the coaching, counseling and problem solving method, the results are the same: the empowerment of the employee to grow and expand his/her expertise.

We believe, and our experience has proven, that these steps, provide a support to the supervision model that enables administrators to aid their staff. This empowering serves to facilitate people in Becoming (Rogers 1962). This ongoing process is described so well by Dr. Earl Pullias (1975), who observed that people gain satisfaction not simply by achieving, but by continually striving to achieve new and greater goals. Operationalizing supervision of instruction provides that process.

SUPERVISION: A TOO OFTEN CHECKERED HISTORY

It should be noted, however, that the supervision process has a long and negative history. An examination of that history will give one insight as to why an adversary relationship so often exists between supervisor and supervisee. Additionally it will make clear what our responsibilities are irrespective of prior practice.

McGregor (1972) cited three reasons why managers did not like to evaluate staff. He held that they distrust the evaluation instrument, they dislike criticizing others, and they are unable to conduct an interview. Most people can recognize and relate to the first two. However seldom have they considered that the ability to conduct an interview is an integral and essential element in evaluating staff. Perhaps that is because it is a technique that has seldom been modeled by their supervisors.

Maier (1976) describes three distinct evaluation processes: tell and sell (tell them how to do it and sell them on doing it your way); tell and listen (tell them how to do it, listen to their concerns, and tell them again how to do it); and, problem solving (work cooperatively with the employee to involve him/her in developing options to solve the problem).

Richard Manatt (1982), in relating these three styles to the educational environment, points out that most administrators use the tell and sell and tell and listen process. He suggests that the problem solving technique is only tried by those principals who are very secure in their knowledge of effective teaching and

applied educational psychology.

While McGregor probably had an accurate assessment and Maier has developed a useful typology and Manatt may accurately describe cognitive deficiencies, there are skill and process voids left in many administrative repertoires.

We believe that the reason administrators may be reluctant to use the problem solving technique is two-fold: one is that they have seldom had it modeled for them as they were ascending the ranks from teacher to administrator and two, administrative development programs emphasize documentation, not development. In other words, emphasis is placed on the summative (a review of what has happened) and not on the formative (an analysis on how things can be changed to improve the process).

Yet the current literature on teacher evaluation makes a strong case for a change in the role of the principal. Edmonds (1978),Lezotte 1985) and Blumberg (1980) state that the principal must be a strong instructional leader. With evaluation being a critical component of instructional leadership, their involvement in focusing, coaching, counseling and evaluating (Diagram 1) will undoubtedly make a great impact on the quality of instruction.

The richness in the current literature reinforces this philosophy of focusing, coaching and counseling as preliminary to evaluating. Moreover these skills are dependent on interpersonal skills which are essential for principal effectiveness.

Greenfield's report for the National Institute of Education on the personal charactertistics of successful principals suggests that they have a high degree of interpersonal skill. Thompson (1967) states that many of the tasks of principals require interpersonal relationships. Goldhammer reports that the largest number of problems identified by principals involves their difficulty in establishing and maintaining successful human relations. Further secondary principals surveyed (Duke 1982) said that "evaluation, advising and conferencing...are some of their most important tasks."

These concepts are reinforced in TEACHER EVALUATION, A STUDY OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICES (1986), a study recently issued by The Rand Corporation. The authors, Wise, Darling-Hammond, et al, state that school districts should train evaluators in observation and evaluation techniques. In support, one of the administrators interviewed stated that "Teacher evaluation is one of the most powerful ways to impact instruction." The study goes on to cite: "For improvement of objectives, evaluation processes must yield rich, descriptive information that illuminates sources of difficulty as well as viable courses for change." Therefore, the notion of focusing, coaching, counseling, and evaluating by problem solving is pivotal since "tell and sell" and "tell and listen" Maier (1976) are not processes which elicit "rich descriptive data that illuminates." Thus the administrator must possess expertise in two areas: as a problem solver and as a change agent.

SUMMARY

We believe that the model suggested in Diagram 2, in using the techniques described, provides the practitioner with a workable set of tools to become a change agent to improve and enhance the performance of employees. Further, this process is not limited to the certificated staff. The concepts are based on principles of behavior which work with all employees. This suggests that the model is a tool for working with classified staff, parents, students as well as members of the community.

At this point we reaffirm our belief about employee evaluation: it is a gift to the employee. It states that in focusing, coaching, counseling and evaluating, the administrator is viewing the employee as capable of growing, learning, and changing. It challenges the old model that places the evaluator in the role of judge and jury, making judgments based on subjective data. It places the evaluator and evaluatee on the same side, with the goal of improvement. It does not assign blame. Inherent in the process is the belief that people want to perform to the best of their abilities. Moreover, it is based on the philosophy that people do not come to work in the morning with the thought of doing a poor job. Further, if they are not successful and the results are negative, they are torn with the knowledge that the performance was not the best. Unfortunately they may not quite know how to make it better. We offer to you a technique that could ameliorate the problem.

We believe that problem solving is a method that

administrators can and should use to encourage performance improvement. This technique is dependent upon a knowledge and facility in conducting a sensing interview, being knowledgeable in facilitating change, and being able and comfortable in problem solving with subordinates. In this way, administrators empower employees to develop new skills, explore and change inappropriate behaviors, and take responsibility and credit for the results.

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